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Nicaragua: Sandinista Hard Line

The Sandinistas, buoyed by their success in obtaining a UN Security Council seat, are pushing a new propaganda offensive against US-Honduran "aggression." They want a resolution in the OAS to support their position, and plan to host a special non-aligned movement meeting in early 1983. They also have obtained recent support for their policies from the Socialist International. []

Continued anti-Sandinista attacks have the military on the defensive. The government has declared a military emergency along the Honduran border and reinforced units there with tanks and artillery. Should the situation worsen, Managua may ask for increased Cuban help. []

Meanwhile, the Sandinistas continue their military buildup. They will soon receive two Soviet AN-26 transport aircraft to improve logistical support capabilities, and they continue to get Soviet MI-2 and MI-8 helicopters for counterinsurgency operations. A new shipment of Soviet medium tanks arrived in late November, the first since May 1981. []

Nevertheless, there are no indications that delivery of MIG fighter aircraft is imminent. While the Sandinistas have stated publicly that they will not get fighter aircraft anytime soon, they continue work on airfield improvements. Fighter pilots trained in Bulgaria also are to begin returning soon. Thus, if the Cubans decide to provide MIGs on short notice, the Nicaraguans soon may be capable of operating them. []

On the domestic political front, the regime is attempting to portray itself in moderate terms. It has begun a dialogue with the opposition aimed at formulating new laws to govern the proposed 1985 elections. It also has invited the Pope to visit by early next year in an attempt to defuse criticism by the Catholic Church. Despite these tactical moves, the regime appears intent on consolidating its political control. []

